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ABSTRACT

The needs for the church, particularly the local congregation, to join forces with the community college to exploit it as a resource for doing its own work better, and for the college to make good on its promises on behalf of the common community are discussed. The concern of the church is directed to the actual environment in which students endeavor to develop. Local churches and local churchmen should call educators and educational institutions to the fulfillment of their good objectives. Improving the total educational experience for high-risk students means an improved learning environment for all. As part-time instructors and peer counseling with faculty, pastors can aid the students. Projects that place students in community agencies can be joint projects between the churches and community service agencies. Professional campus ministers could be appointed to attend the regular public meeting of the governing boards of the community colleges. It is the local churches to whom local decision makers listen and to whom persons can turn for guidance on continuing-education opportunity. (DB)

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PERSPECTIVES

ON

THE CHURCH AND THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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PAPER NUMBER SIX

THE LOCAL CHURCH AND THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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"People Changers Need Each Other"

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The Local Church and the Community College: People Changers Need Each Other

There's a giant of an institution in our communities, but it is not the giant who is sleeping. This giant is perhaps the most ecumenical phenomenon around. It has assumed herculean tasks which the church long believed to be its special prerogative, the salvation (or salvage) of souls, the transformation of lives. It offers help and hope to educationally and vocationally helpless or crippled in a setting of acceptance and practical supportiveness. It is time we woke up and took notes of the giant!

The Community College, sitting there within your parish and mine, may be enrolling as many as 80% of the high school graduates for their first year of college. About one third of the nation's students are in two-year colleges. Some educators predict that two years of college will become the norm in this country and life long learning experiences available like an ESCALATOR. You get on when you want to learn a new skill, or go somewhere different with your life, then get off when you think you've arrived. You're never too old to try, or to get back on. Chances are good that mothers and fathers from your church families, as well as youth, are involved within this college.

What is happening to them there? Rubbing shoulders with contemporaries from widely divergent cultural backgrounds, values and life-styles is sure to bring significant change in perceptive, and perhaps in sense of vocation. How is the college experience contributing to their

growth as caring persons able to translate faith into living? To what extent does such schooling either increase their options for self-actualization, or limit them? This is a pastoral concern that extends beyond Sunday morning out into the workaday world of your people.

Within these colleges, too, will be numbers of persons disaffected from and unaffected by organized religion because of economics, culture, sociology, educational opportunity or motivation. The college, which is common to all the communities-within-a-community, could be a most important link for any local church whose mission concern extends beyond parish walls. Look at the commitment of our national church bodies in recent years to work on behalf of the disenfranchised and powerless of society, a concern for equal opportunity, racial justice, urban crises and welfare reform. This contemporary Christian mission converges dramatically with the clientele and concerns of your community's two year people's college. The fast pace of our society requires higher and further education for all who can benefit from it. The church cares about institutional integrity within the total community, and has historic interest in public education and citizen participation in decision-making.

This paper is a call for the church, particularly the local congregation, to join forces with a parallel institution, the Community College, to exploit (or mine) it as a resource for doing its own work

better, and to call the college to make good on its promises on behalf of our common community. People changers need each other.

THE EDUCATIONAL ESCALATOR

Traditional campus ministry has assummed a "student" is a youth embarked on a four-year residential hitch, whose primary vocational indentity is that of learner in a period of preparation: preparation for marriage and parenthood, for work, and for adult citizenship. Almost none of these life situations hold true for people enrolled in the community college.

All are COMMUTERS: geographically, chronologically (note the wide age span) and psychologically. Commuting between the world of work and the world of classes, juggling roles of employment, parenthood, citizenship, and studenthood; they hardly find the campus central to much of their activity and time investment. They are passing through on their way to something else.

The Open Door policy of public community colleges beckons many who before would never have considered higher education, many first-generation college goers. These "new students" (a term used by Pat Cross) are likely to have been academic low-achievers, perhaps with pervasive experience of failure in the public school system.[1] Those poor students who are also poor financially have a second, perhaps a first chance in the people's college where tuition is minimal or free. It may take many semesters to complete the necessary work of a particular program, transfer or

occupational, because they cannot afford to be full-time students. The mind-set is that of transiency. What may be called "drop-outs" statistically may be more like "step-outs" and "step-ins."

Thus the figure of the ESCALATOR, passing to and fro through a cafeteria or super-market of learning possibilities, poses a whole new ministry. One thing is clear: activities for students, that front line of the churches' ministry to youth, prove largely irrelevant. If you're hoping for a base to extend the senior fellowship for two more years, there is no need to get excited about the community commuter college. No student is looking to the church to establish shelter islands or "fraternal chapters of church kids" at the campus. It is a different set of needs and possibilities which confront us here.

While the church is not called to provide an "alternative environment" (surrogate church) on campus, our pastoral concern is directed to the actual environment in which students endeavor to develop. Can it be made an environment where personhood is valued, enhanced, or channeled? Where the ESCALATOR really gives people a lift?

CONCERN FOR
THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Pastoral concern centers on the quality of life in all the experiences that people have. The non-traditional students especially bring with them to the campus a host of peripheral worries and heartaches, prejudices, aspirations, which may seem unrealistic, disabilities of one kind of another. They come eager for a passport

to a more desirable place in society (salvation). Taking literally the publicity about the Open Door, they expect it to lead into warm and accepting living rooms. Perhaps unfairly, they expect the college to fulfill many non-educational functions, to provide for affective as well as cognitive needs.

It is only in a climate of concern for persons that many will be free to do critical thinking and learn occupational or academic skills. The community college has a philosophical commitment to provide this kind of climate. Recent research suggests that,

> while community college faculties think that the intellectual growth of students is important, they are much more prone than university faculties to assume responsibility for helping students identify their personal and career goals and develop as people and as future job holders. [2]

Where vocational preparation of students and attention to their personal development are given top priority, by faculty and administrators alike, personnel services receive much emphasis. Yet counselling services are woefully inadequate and, in large urban areas particularly, staff may be insensitive to cultural values that are different or impatient with those who are indeed new to post-secondary education.

One role required of the Church in our day is to raise questions with those in authority within the life of the college, calling the educational institution to remain faithful to its commitments and

become effective in its services. If a pastoral relationship with a person is inseparable from the prophetic role which calls that person to be true to the best he knows, there is also a pastoral/prophetic responsibility to call educators and educational institutions to the fulfillment of their good objectives.

It is the local church and local churchmen who must do this for the local community college. No national boards and agencies can mobilize around specific issues within your parish-community with the same sincereity and effectiveness. Hopefully, you are close to the pulse of your community, you know where special needs exist. Your proclamation of good news can be translated into action where there is bad news.

LIBERATION FOR THE DISENFRANCHISED

Often the educational experience is bad news, just another reinforcement of a pattern of failure, another case of high hopes shattered. The Open Door can be a revolving door or a trap door for those labeled "high risk" on the basis of previous academic achievement.

It is here that the dilemma facing community college converges sharply with the church's commitment to a higher order of justice and liberation for all persons. We act out our concern for individual persons by focusing on the school as a potential liberating force in society.

The ideal college of the past has served essentially a middle-class or upper-class clientele. When the Community

College takes on special responsibility for disadvantaged populations (urban or rural) it may be, like many of its enrollees, uncertain of its identity. Does it draw its identity from feeder high schools as an extension into grades 13 and 14? Or is it merely a feeder into the four-year colleges, another screening (or "cooling out") device for those whose learning styles and experiences preclude success in traditional higher education? Can it be a comprehensive college, removing the artificial cleavage between so-called academic education and career education, providing with no distinction for different students seeking different futures and needing help? Contributing to the dilemma is the influx of more of the traditional students into the two-year colleges for their first years of higher education at lower cost. For the most part this is a positive factor, providing a broader cross-section of intellectual stimulation and multi-cultural understanding for everyone. But will this relegate to a back burner the goal of soliciting and serving the high risk students who have no chance elsewhere?

Local churches include a goodly share of such persons, whose potentials and strengths will be tapped only with special encouragement. The local pastor in counseling youth needs to be aware of what is available for them in the local college. The pastor could do much to offset the inferiority complex about "just going to a junior college" which

is perpetuated often by high school counselors. A boost to self-image is an important pastoral ministry, especially to a "late bloomer" who might get lost in a big university setting but at the community college might have time to mature as a person and as a more competent student, more certain of life direction and worth.

Beyond such counseling, the pastor along with colleagues both lay and clergy, influence the college toward awakening such innate potential for growth in such students. J. Springer, calling the church to an advocacy role in this regard, applauds

> the vision of some educators who wish to reach out to those in our society who are being passed by on the other side and an institution which seeks to give some of our young a second chance, a new opportunity, a new beginning that will break away the suffocating and defeating walls of past decisions and predicaments.[3]

What he suggests applies not just to youth, for men (especially veterans of war or prison) and many women well past age 30 are seeking such second chances for meaningful life and work, or retraining for a variety of job markets. Moreover, the bulk of minority group students now in higher education are in the community colleges. Whether or not our own youth enroll there, it is urgent that we be prophet/enablers with the college to meet these needs.

Improving the total educational experience for high risk students means

an improved learning enviroment for all of us, and an enhanced experience of American society. In general, our mainline churches have not interacted with populations represented by the "new students." Instead of planning charity programs for them, church members could on these democratized campuses rub shoulders with them as contemporaries. The diversity of ages among those pursuing common classroom goals is a plus factor. As one president puts it,

> It's just possible that older people may enrich and animate our campuses in a way that hasn't occurred since the golden days of the GI Bill of Rights. It's just possible that people with work experience, plus commitment to learning, will turn out to be the best students we've ever had. It's just possible that age diversity may be as exciting as ethnic and religious diversity...I suspect there will be far greater integration among the ages than has yet arrived among the races.[4]

A cure for the generation gap: enroll yourself and your young people in the community college. By all means, encourage people of your parish to avail themselves of the college offerings, and begin to use people and program resources from the college in your own adult education programs. With so many "women actively returninging to education" that a group has been organized called AWARE, church women's groups may want to rethink their monthly programming and all enroll in a given class at the college, or ask the college to provide a short course around

their special interest. This approach to ministry will benefit the local church with new insights and experiences probably nowhere else so readily at hand.

MINISTRY FOR AND WITH TEACHERS

What are some ways churches could help to change the odds in favor of the less favored in the educational scheme of things? We can use our influence with the college teachers, many of them "children of the church" and more than a few theologically trained. Whereas administrators may have genuine commitment to policies described above, there is not enough skill yet in teaching those who have these drastic needs for understanding and support. A faculty not basically committed to this as a central task literally does not know how to teach them. We cannot blithely assume that faculty members of long standing are so committed, as studies show when junior college faculty rate themselves as not fully understanding nor supporting the unique role of public community colleges and education for everybody. The "new students" meet still the Old Instructors.[5]

One Dean of Instruction wished for some mini-conferences for faculty to "help them not to be afraid of their own students," and hinted that church leaders might be closer to the changing needs and values of present-day students than those who interact with them each day in the classrooms. There are indeed church educators skilled in a variety of educational approaches who could contribute much to teaching/learning/counsel-

ing situations. I believe colleges would welcome such skill-sharing of neighborhood clergy, once they were trustful that parochial interests were not the motivation for such participation. The most practical approach is an ecumenical one, representing some cooperative church bodies. Clergy are welcomed as auxiliary crisis counselors by staff whose main responsibility is academic advisement yet who are confronted by students with deep spiritual and mental health needs.

Short of becoming part-time instructors at the college, how could pastors influence personnel services, the curriculum, and teaching methods? Here friendship and dialogue with faculty members are both possible and of mutual benefit. In small, informal, open-ended groups, you can ask them to share their perceptions of students' needs and the college's program. You enhance their self-esteem by becoming the learner, and you receive valuable insights. You share current reading and ideas across inter disciplinary lines, raising value dimension questions about the issues with which educators must struggle. This "ministry of asking questions," sometimes embarrassing ones, may give added impetus for the college to take action. Peer counseling with faculty, who also have faith crises and personal perplexities, may be the most valuable service that can be rendered <u>on behalf of the students</u>

with whom faculty have more direct and on going influence than representatives of the established church currently enjoy.

The real campus ministry is that carried by those within the institutions ...counselors, instructors, students themselves...who advocate for and act upon faith and value commitments. The ministry of the church must focus on helping such in-the-system campus ministers to be intentionally about the task of "putting life together in meaningful patters of coherence." Can you catalyze some faculty members toward a ministry from the inside, encouraging them to keep that institution sensitive to the hopes and dreams and special needs of a changing student body from a complex community? Advocating for the Open Door to really lead somewhere seems top priority for the church's involvement in this campus ministry.

ORIENTATION TOWARD COMMUNITY SERVICE

The Open Door needs also to be a double door, and perhaps a swinging one. Here are centers for continuing education, tailoring curriculum and services to immediate needs of the community's various organizations and sub cultures. The Community Services component, on paper at least, makes a triangle with College Parallel (transfer) programs and Occupational-Vocational functions. Such orientation represents an importance convergent point with the avowed purposes of local churches, too, to serve the community. As I suggest in an earlier paper, it is this corner of the campus I recommend

as a beginning contact point for local pastors.[6] By membership on Advisory Committees for Community Services, local church members (not just pastors) could be catalysts, enablers, and important input/feedback agents for the college. There are some exciting projects which place students in community agencies, where the community itself becomes classroom and laboratory. Participants find themselves moving toward human services vocations as well as toward being knowledgeable and skilled volunteers. The church can involve students in this way through social welfare agencies, schools, centers for senior citizens, half-way houses, hot lines and the like. Don't hesitate to take the initiative with Community Services to suggest such joint projects. The churches are learning-growth centers, too, very much in the business of adult education. Plans need to be developed and reported where churches use the resources and facilities of these community colleges for their own efforts at leadership training, consciousness raising, and general adult education. Short courses, joint surveys of needs, community celebrations, mobilization of services in events like Health Fairs, a clearing house regarding welfare services in the community, are possible. If you have the imagination, the Community Services may very well have the facilitating resources. Ministry of one institution with another is possible.

No matter what great ideas for relevant education and learning-for-life

SHEPERD OF SYSTEMS

may be generated through student/faculty/ administrator efforts, or even through the churches of the community, unless the Board of Trustees can be persuaded to approve and vote necessary funds, the process is at a standstill, and sometimes reversed.

Trustees are sensitive to the expressed concerns of citizen groups who are part of their voting constituency. Though the trend may be toward more state mandated policies for Community Colleges as for the other branches of public higher education, there is more local involvement in control here. Standing in the community as agencies of "moral dialogue" voluntary associations of people of goodwill, one "little public," local churches especially in concert on an ecumenical voice could raise a voice that would be heard.

> The first ministry of the local church should not be to race to the campus with chaplains and religious centers, but to march to the local school boards and state legislatures to lobby for high standards of education in these institutions.

Because of their local base, the Community Colleges will be the most fertile field of post-secondary education for such an expression of ministry, and being prophet-enabler for responsible decision making may be the most important pastor service <u>to</u> students, whose options are quite determined by policies decided by the few decision makers. From the Journal of Pastoral Psychology comes this thought:

"Focus on the individual and his vicissitudes are like looking at the trees" without seeing the configuration of the forect.[8] "The pastor who is a SHEPARD OF SYSTEMS will seek to place his given social system (church) in context as a sub-system vis-a-vis other major sub systems."[9] Put another way, ministry in the context of an ESCALATOR includes being concerned that the escalator does not become a "down-the-up-stairs."

Our concern for persons compels us to enter a ministry of redemption for public education, and here is opportunity for many people to be campus ministers without necessarily setting foot on the campus. Could your church appoint someone to sit in regularly at the public meetings of the governing board for your college, reporting to the congregation about issues which are crucial? Are there church members, including students, who should seek such elective offices? This ministry falls within the scope of both the Christian Education committees and the Social Concerns or Public Affairs committees of the local church or judicatory. It is a natural extension of pastoral concern, prophetic witness, and "speaking truth to power," on the agenda of every church and every pastor.

A LOCAL CHURCH IMPERATIVE

Even if 1,000 professional Campus Ministers were suddenly deployed to Community College campuses, it would still be <u>local churches</u> to whom local decision makers would listen; to whom persons young and old could turn for guidance on

continuing education opportunity; and through whom Christian concern for the life of the larger community could be channeled. Whereas in the past our attention has been directed toward "church related colleges," we need to recognize that each congregation is, geographically at least, now a "college related church." Pastors and people will have to initiate and carry any intentional "campus ministry" for community college. (Yet where in Seminary education are would-be pastors being confronted with the Community College phenomenon?)

Why should the local church get excited about the community college? A large portion of our church youth will be moving into undergraduate work there. Adults from your parish will be moving in and out of the college, developing self-knowledge and job skills, experiencing and becoming expertise in community service. No more promising vehicle exists for the marginal student to build upon strengths and abilities, replacing a failure syndrome with success experience.

Yet these local, responsive, flexible institutions could fall prey to apathy or bureaucracy; to the trap of promising all things to all people, providing access but not success to the most helpless. There are forces within public education which threaten the development of individual autonomy and experience of the democratic order, forces unsympathetic to New Students. Can local churches and denominational

agencies alike be mobilized as informed and effectively caring "little publics" to counteract such forces?

Life transformation and human ecology are offered as overriding concerns for both church and college. And people-changers need each other.

FOOTNOTES

1. The "new student" concept is fully developed by Patricia K. Cross in her book, Beyond the Open Door, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco: 1971 and in her article "The New Learners, Changing Perspectives on Quality Education," Change Magazine, February, 1973.
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3. Springer, J., "The High-Risk Student, The Community College, and The Church as Advocate," Connexion, United Ministries in Higher Education, New York: Fall, 1973.

4. Bennis, Warren, "The University Leaders," Saturday Review, New York: Dec.9,1972

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6. Geier, Mary Alice, "There's A Community College in My Town: What do I do Now?" Handbook for Churchmen Concerned About Community Colleges, Campus Ministry with Community Colleges in Southern California, Los Angeles: 1972.

7. Ambrose, W. Hayden, "Higher Education and the Local Church," Foundations, A Baptist Journal of History and Theology, Rochester, N.Y.: 1967.

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